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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1428
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1368
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 3683
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4070
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 8602
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 000859

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STATE FOR WHA A/S SHANNON AND PDAS SHAPIRO
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SUBJECT: CONTINUED GOVERNMENT INSINUATIONS OF U.S. ROLE IN
DEADLY BOMBINGS

REF: LA PAZ 815

Classified By: Ambassador David N. Greenlee for reasons 1.4d and b.

¶1. (C) Summary: Bolivian Government officials, including President Morales, have continued to suggest a possible USG role in the deadly La Paz bombings March 21 (ref). While Morales has persisted in professing ignorance about any formal expression of U.S. displeasure, March 26 news articles outlined the concrete steps the Embassy has taken to underscore our concern. Bolivia's Ambassador-designate to the U.S. Sacha Llorentty told us the president's accusations were exacerbated by his having been branded a terrorist by the U.S. in the past, but denied that Venezuelan and Cuban advisors had any hand in shaping them. Embassy interaction with the GOB remained largely frozen last week, though the Ambassador will likely resume ministerial-level contacts this week. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Following his initial polemical accusations of official U.S. involvement in the bombings that killed two people and injured a number of others last week in downtown La Paz (ref), President Evo Morales and other high-level government officials continued to suggest a possible behind-the-scenes U.S. role in the crime. In a March 24 meeting with international donors, Morales reportedly emphasized the "suspicious" circumstances of the crime and said that treating it as an isolated incident was inconceivable. In a late March 24 meeting with Vice Foreign Minister Mauricio Dorfler, Ecopol counselor reiterated official U.S. concern, and asked how the government planned to respond. He was then shown the text of a draft communique that called for a full investigation into the facts but also clearly left open the possibility of U.S. involvement. Following notice of our objections to the draft, the MFA decided not to release the statement. Over the March 25-26 weekend, other GOB officials, including Minister of the Presidency de la Quintana, likewise have refused to retract earlier accusations or move to limit further damage.

¶3. (SBU) At the same time, Morales and other high-level government officials have persisted in professing ignorance about any formal expressions of U.S. displeasure in connection to the president's remarks. According to news reports, De la Quintana said he had heard nothing from the U.S. Embassy, but added that if any message was passed, it would amount to an attack against the government.

¶4. (SBU) News reports on the issue suggest that government officials are playing dumb. One full-page March 26 article in the La Paz-based newspaper La Prensa outlined the concrete steps the U.S. Government had already taken to express its displeasure. These were: canceling a planning meeting for the Vice-President's proposed trip to Washington; sending no representative to the March 24 international donors' meeting with Morales (a clear message from Bolivia's number one donor, the article emphasized); sending a lower-ranking representative to Bolivia's "Day of the Sea" celebrations (in which Bolivia's officialdom reaffirm the country's historical claim for an outlet to the sea); and calling in Bolivia's Charge d'Affaires in Washington to request formal clarification of the president's comments. The article failed to note the Ambassador's March 22 telephone call to VP Garcia (ref). (Comment: All told, it is certain that Morales and his key Ministers have received the messages but have chosen to feign public ignorance about them for internal political reasons. End Comment.)

¶5. (SBU) During a March 25 social dinner attended by poloff, Bolivia's Ambassador-designate to the U.S. Sacha Llorentty speculated about the president's deeper motives in straining bilateral relations at this time, offering a cautious

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psychoanalytic mix of "I don't know, but you must understand." He said that violent, high profile crimes like these were rare in Bolivia, and therefore rocked the political environment disproportionately. Moreover, that this bombing had occurred at the outset of Morales' term fed his view that he -- and his new government -- had been explicitly targeted. Llorentty said that Morales remained resentful about his prolonged ostracism, and his having (allegedly) been branded a narco-terrorist, by the U.S. government, and that this feeling had exacerbated his reaction. Poloff responded that this explanation could convince a person inclined to feel sympathetic, but would not hold water with many others, including in Washington. Llorentty disagreed that Venezuelan and Cuban advisors within the government had helped shape the tone and content of the President's public remarks, emphasizing that Bolivia would maintain its many friendships but submit to no foreign power.

¶6. (C) Embassy interactions with the GOB have remained largely frozen. The Ambassador, however, will likely attend meetings with the Minister of Hydrocarbons (March 28) and the Minister of Mining (March 31). We have made our point and as of now are on the high ground. As we move forward, we will continue to adjust to--but also try to influence--this turbulent political environment.
GREENLEE